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ABSTRACT

Project MAS (taken from the Spanish, meaning "more") was designed to offer MORE alternatives to students. The program, developed for the Hartford Public High School (HPHS), Connecticut, is intended not only to reduce the phenomenon known as "dropping out" (a student centered problem) but also to reduce the phenomenon known as "pushing out" (a school centered problem). The program's background, development, objectives for the next five years, and evaluation are discussed. Three major components of the project are: Staff Development; Instruction; and Supportive Services. The problems of HPHS epitomize those of urban America. Social, economic, and educational problems are common to almost every urban community. The Project attempts to discover strategies that will identify the problems, the factors involved, and prescribe actions that will lead to solutions. (Author/LS)

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PROJECT MAS — "¿Que esta pasando?"

by W. KELLEY SPEED

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"I was going to quit, but I heard about your program so I stayed." Two days ago one of the juniors in Hartford Public High School said this to me during a telephone call to his home late in the afternoon. I made the call to the student after having received a GREEN SHEET from the young man's counselor, warning me that here was a potential dropout. This referral was made to me as the Continuing Education Coordinator of the Supportive Services Component of Project MAS, a federally-funded project for dropout prevention.

Project MAS (taken from the Spanish, meaning "more") was designed to offer MORE alternatives for students: its design permits implementation of a program that not only can be responsive to each student's needs, capabilities, interests, and learning styles but also can be flexible enough to accommodate these individual differences. The program was developed on the basis of the characteristics of students who actually dropped out of Hartford Public High School during the past three years. As a result, the Project is diversified to the extent that there are three components in the program: Staff Development, Instruction, and Supportive Services. The program is intended not only to reduce the phenomenon known as "dropping out" (a student-centered problem) but also to reduce the phenomenon known as "pushing out" (a school-centered problem).

In many ways, the problems of Hartford, Connecticut, epitomize the problems of urban America. Here, in what has been frequently described as the "typical American city in microcosm," are found the vast multitude of social and economic problems common to almost every major city in the country. And educational problems common to almost every urban community. The Project attempts to discover strategies that will identify the problems, the factors involved, and prescribe actions that will lead to solutions.

Because of rising high school dropout figures — from 8.3% in 1867-68 to 12% last year, this problem has received close scrutiny over the past few years. A Dropout Prevention Community Council was formed and became involved in the total project; parents, local businessmen, and students participated actively

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with members of school staffs in the preparation of the proposal. The Council continues to act as a coordinating body that is empowered to handle all matters that will have an effect upon the Project.

While an awareness of the individuality of each dropout was essential to the considerations of the Council, some common indices became apparent. The *typical* dropout is just over sixteen, possesses an average or slightly below-average TESTED measure of intelligence, has not achieved according to his potential, cannot read at grade level, and academically is in the lowest quarter of his class. Most likely our typical dropout happens to be a boy who is slightly overage for his grade since he was held back at least once in the elementary or junior high school years. Although he may have been in trouble with the law, he has received many school referrals for disciplinary infractions and these were often accompanied by suspensions. While in school, the pre-dropout seldom participated in extra-curricular activities (and was often formally excluded because of academic failures). This alienation tended to produce a feeling of rejection by both the school and his fellow classmates and was reflected, in turn, by a further rejecting of both the school and of himself as an individual. The dropout was at best passive (or at worst — depending upon one's point of view.) And so it all began with the growing loss of respect and continuing academic and disciplinary failures, and the cycle continued, spinning so rapidly that the student was flung off into an undefinable space — an addition to a society of dropouts.

Hartford Public High School cumulative records showed his parents were school dropouts, as were his older brothers and sisters. Notations indicated that he had had few friends, has few friends, and among these, more than 50% were usually older dropouts. Surveys indicated that he knew an education is needed, yet he could not bring himself to enroll in an adult education program — this seemed to him irrelevant.

Not only were the characteristics of the potential dropout classified, but also the dropout syndrome in terms of Hartford's mixed ethnic situation. A representative survey of the Hartford Public High School revealed that during the 1968-69 school year, 553 students, or almost 9% of Hartford's total 9-12 grade enrollment, withdrew. These withdrawals followed a pattern somewhat representative of Hartford's total school population: 46% were black; 38.1%, white; and 15.9%, Puerto Rican. Of these 533

dropouts, 341, or 62% of the total, came from Hartford Public High School: of these, 56.4% were males; 43.3%, females. Ethnically, Hartford Public High School dropouts were 40.7% Negro; 37.8%, white; and 21.4%, Puerto Rican: minority groups made up a full 62.4% of the total.

Hartford Public High School Guidance Department and two community coordinators conducted a more intensive — more humanizing — survey that revealed several representative school statistics:

1. The percentage of absenteeism increases during the last year of full membership in school.
2. Many dropouts felt a passive discrimination against them on the part of the total school system.
3. Math and English final marks averaged out at HIGH failing level.
4. Reading scores ranged at best two years below grade level.
5. Math scores indicated at least a 1.5 year lag.
6. In general, in intelligence testing the average dropout fell well within the functional range.

Additional observable data revealed that the numbers of special services referrals were notably low.

Several logical conclusions could be inferred from the data collected: these conclusions served as the substance of the 4 major product objectives in the overall design of Project MAS, a program for 200 students entering the 9th grade at Hartford High School in 1971. Subsets of the 4 major product objectives are 9 product objectives in the Staff Development Component; 6, in the Instructional Component; and 8, in Supportive Services; in addition to 32 process objectives. Each objective carries with it an evaluative instrument constructed to show the percentage of achievement. Daily, weekly, monthly, and interim reports indicate the status of each objective.

The Project MAS proposal (funded under Title VII, USOE) seeks to achieve the following objectives within the next FIVE years:

1. Eliminate the need to classify students as dropouts because of their inability to function within the target schools.
2. Create a student historical data bank that will enable school personnel to respond quickly to student char-

acteristics which are indicative of a potential dropout.

3. Develop lines of communication for registering legitimate concerns by parents, students, teachers.
4. Establish a model (Project MAS at HPHS.)
5. Develop inservice training enabling staff to develop instructional strategies.
6. Develop a student-oriented curriculum that strengthens a student's self-image by providing successful learning experiences so that he can feel a sense of individual worth; provide school-related activities that do not threaten his self-concept; provide opportunities for him to come into contact with his adult reality which makes demands and requires salable skills.
7. Establish a supportive service center with the necessary staff to move aggressively within and beyond the schools to remove obstacles that prevent students from securing a quality education.

During the school year 1971-72, the staff of Project MAS will be held accountable for performance related to the following four overall product objectives:

1. The dropout rate at HPHS, grades 9-12, will be reduced by at least 20% as compared to the dropout rate for 1970-71.
   ("¿Que´ esta pasando?" Total number of dropouts '70-'71 — 385, 12%: number of dropouts September — December — 116, 4.2%. Observation: if we work HARDER we may be able to meet this objective.)

2. Student attendance rate in the target schools, grades 1 — 12, will increase at least 5% over the previous year.

   ("What is happening?" Attendance rate at HPHS for '70-'71 — 79.8%. Attendance rate from September through December — 85.4%. Observation: "We must be doing something right!")

3. The average daily rate of suspensions will decrease by at least 30%.

   (The number of suspensions in the model school in '70-'71 - 1245. During September through December - 292. Observation: Although the average daily rate has not been computed, a safe prediction is that the Project will meet this objective.)

4. The number of major disciplinary offenses (warning for major behavioral infractions) issued to students will be reduced by 5%.

   (The data for '70-'71 shows an astonishing number - 19,786. To date we have accumulated 3882. Observation: There is an improvement — perhaps in classifying.)

As stated above, the three major components of the Project are Staff Development, Instruction, and Supportive Services. Due to the nature of the three components, both differential and comprehensive elements have been incorporated into the total evaluative design. Necessarily, continuous information that can be used in program modification as well as assessment of pupil product outcome has been included. Instruments designed to evaluate staff development process objectives include evaluations through teacher reports, teacher logs, teacher attendance, and agendas as well as on site observations of summer workshops in achievement motivation that involved all 9th grade teachers at HPHS, Project MAS professional and paraprofessional staffs and inservice programs for MAS staff and HPHS staff continuing throughout 1971-72.

The performance objectives for the Instructional Component are stated in terms of product, operational process, and management process. Included in the product objectives for MAS students are the following:

1 (No. 3) The number of failing grades will be reduced by 50%.
2 (No. 4) The students will demonstrate an improved attitude toward school as demonstrated by class preparedness, class participation, relations with classmates and teachers.
3 (No. 5) The students will demonstrate an increased sense of personal worth as evidenced by: 1. improved display of self-confidence 2. setting of goals 3. improved personal relations with others.
4 (No. 6) 50% of the students receiving instruction in the Spanish instructional unit will be able after completing 8 cycles to function at an equivalent level in an English instructional cycle. (The Instructional Component is divided into an English unit and a Spanish unit: organizational pattern for

instruction is cycle and recycle if less than 90% mastery is achieved; the system has a built-in "no-failure" concept.)

5 (No. 7) Mean achievement levels in mathematics and reading will increase by at least 1.5 grade levels.

In addition to the baseline data provided by the 1970-71 school records, pre-testing, testing, and post-testing, the elements of each cycle (diagnostic testing, placement, prescription, instruction, and evaluation), statements from students and staff members indicate acts responsive to the objectives;

Student: "....In '71 I was low in grades low towards myself. But this year I think I can do it and right now is the time to start....I am going to show them (parents-family) I can be somebody they'll be proud of."

Science (Spanish): "....In short, we have been observing ourselves, how we are made, how we differ, how we grow, survive in our environment, and how we can live better."

Mathematics (English): "....Individual folders with a description of assignments are given each student prior to a Project MAS cycle. The students are constantly aware of what they are expected to do in order to earn their credit and grades."

Mathematics (Spanish): "....At the present time, Project MAS students are beginning to realize that there are people that care about them, and they are changing their negative attitudes and creating a new self-image that will help place them in the mainstream."

English (English): " 'The first person who can guess the ending of 'Two Bottles of Relish' will receive one free period to do with what he wishes." In response to the class complaint 'we don't want to do some jive vocabulary' I took the words from our vocabulary list and was pleasantly dumbfounded by the response to "jive" PASSWORD."

In addition to the regular academic classes of science, math-

ematics, reading, English, and social studies, selected students attend a Reading Clinic held each Saturday morning from 9 to 12. Work-for-pay is provided for these students by the Career Development Specialist assigned to the Supportive Services Component.

Several students are already in the mainstream in some of their classes and a close follow-up is maintained by Supportive Services Staff personnel. A teacher of one of these students remarks, "An important aspect of Project MAS is its procedure of placing some of its students into regular classrooms outside of the Project MAS teaching staff. . . . I have found that the student assigned to me is very highly motivated. He spends more time on his assignments than many of my "regular" students. He asks for help and has voiced concern about improvement in his work. Nothing is too taxing for him and he attempts to do his best in everything that he is given to do. He intermingles actively and in a well-disciplined manner with other students."

The services of the Supportive Services Component are extensive and in depth: these include services for regular HPHS students needing them as well as the 9th grade students in Project MAS. More than 328 home visits have been made. Individual counseling, career development which includes job-finding, job placement and follow-up, and continuing education services are provided. Facilities include an on-site center for individualized instruction and guidance in addition to a community education center available for off-site credit courses as well as parent-student-staff meetings, parent instruction, individualized home-instruction, and quiet study. The staff is composed of a Team Leader, Guidance Counselors for both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking students, an Emotional Guidance Specialist, a Youth Services Worker, a Continuing Education Coordinator, Individualized Learning Center Director, and a Career Development Specialist. Several paraprofessionals are directly involved in these and other services.

The Continuing Education services offer courses for students wishing enrichment courses, additional credits needed to offset earlier failures within individually-tailored curricula taught in classes scheduled from 9 to 12 AM or 3 to 6 PM or 7 to 10 PM. Potential dropouts are identified and recommended through Student Leaver Forms or Project MAS referral forms (the green sheet) for appropriate action by the Supportive Services Team. "I was going to quit, but I heard about your program so I stayed."